



COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION & LABOR
REPUBLICANS

COMMITTEE
STATEMENT

**Opening Statement of Rep. Lloyd Smucker (R-PA), Republican Leader
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment Hearing:
“A Major Test: Examining the Impact of COVID-19 on the Future of Higher
Education”
July 7, 2020**

(As prepared for delivery)

"Before I discuss the topic of today' hearing, I want to talk about the importance of doing our work in person. Leader McCarthy recently wrote in a letter to Speaker Pelosi that 'our Congress—a literal coming together of people and ideas—works best when it happens in-person, face-to-face.' I couldn't agree more, so I'll make the same request Ranking Member Foxx made at the start of our last hearing – let's return to congressional precedent and hold our hearings in person.

Turning to the topic of today's hearing – COVID-19 has disrupted nearly every aspect of American society, including higher education.

Back in early March, the University of Washington became the first school to cancel in-person classes. Today, over one thousand colleges and universities have shifted to online-only instruction.

From abrupt school closures to remote online learning, students and educators have faced overwhelming challenges during this pandemic.

That's why Congress and the Department of Education took several steps to ease the burden for states, institutions, and students. The bipartisan CARES Act, passed in March, included provisions to help students, schools, and state governments cope with the changes wrought by the pandemic. In addition to regulatory relief measures for students and institutions, the CARES Act provided borrowers with temporary respite from their repayment obligations. Specifically, the legislation

requires the Secretary to suspend all interest accumulation and monthly payments on federally held student loans through September 30, 2020. Most critically, the CARES Act created and funded the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund, which provided billions in direct aid to students and postsecondary education institutions, including HBCUs and MSIs.

This is not to say our work is done. On the contrary. The pandemic has exposed serious underlying deficiencies in our education system.

Government overreach and unnecessary intervention has contributed to a bloated postsecondary education sector at the expense of students. Tuition and fees have outpaced inflation for decades. Federal requirements stifle interaction between businesses and college campuses.

Instead of innovating, the Democrats' partisan HEROES Act doubles down on failed policies. The legislation forgives \$10,000 of federal and private student loan debt for some borrowers, which does nothing to combat COVID-19 or lower college costs. I recognize we want to help people struggling to make ends meet, but we have data from the Urban Institute to prove that across-the-board loan forgiveness disproportionately helps high-earning, highly educated individuals. Many Americans facing the greatest financial strain as a result of the pandemic do not have student loans.

The bill also launches a socialist takeover of the private student loan market by forcing private student loan companies to offer income-driven repayment terms and conditions dictated by the federal government.

In contrast, Committee Republicans continue to support reforms that strengthen innovation and completion, modernize federal student aid, and promote student opportunities. By giving students the tools needed to complete an affordable postsecondary education we can prepare them to enter the workforce with the skills they need for lifelong success, regardless of their background.

However, these reforms won't matter if we don't reopen our nation's schools and businesses safely and responsibly.

We have a duty to lead this country back to the pre-pandemic economic prosperity that benefited millions of hardworking Americans. Congress can help

further unleash our nation's economic potential by increasing pathways for Americans to succeed in the 21st century workforce. Specifically, this means permitting colleges and universities to leverage employer expertise, encouraging short-term and stackable credentials, and creating a regulatory framework for new methods of learning like competency-based education.

These types of forward-looking reforms have been championed by the Trump administration. Just a couple of weeks ago, President Trump issued an Executive Order to prioritize skills-based hiring within the federal government to help strengthen and diversify our workforce. This action will take our nation's workers and students in a positive direction as we recover from COVID-19, and Congress should follow the administration's lead on this issue.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about how we can improve our education system to better meet the needs of the students, families, and workers."

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